



Catholic **Faith, Life & Creed**

A Complete Catechesis for Christian Living

Doctrinal Catechesis Session
Mary Birmingham

Triduum Part One: Mass of the Lord's Supper



Pascal Adolphe Dagnan-Bouveret, public domain



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us,
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil. Amen.

✓ Note to the Catechist

There may be more material than you can use in a one-hour session. Select and arrange accordingly. Use questions and material that are best suited for your particular group.



Read the connecting statement

to draw the line between this week's liturgy and this chosen doctrinal theme.

This connecting statement is found in the *Breaking Open the Word* worksheet for this week.

Catholic Faith, Life & Creed Version 2.0

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Version 2.0 reflects all recent revisions in
the Roman Missal.

NIHIL OBSTAT
Rev. Steven Olds
Censor Liborum

IMPRIMATUR
† Most Rev. John Noonan
Bishop of Orlando

June 27, 2011

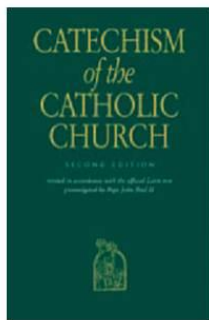
Editors: Bill Huebsch, Diana
Macalintal, & Nick Wagner

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(OPTION: Since Holy Thursday is an important family/community celebration and it is often very difficult for catechists to be away from the family/community for this hallmark yearly event, some parishes dismiss catechumens and allow them to reflect on this liturgy without the facilitation of a catechist. The Elect are by now experts at breaking open the word. They can simply be given this session as a handout and take turns reading various portions and responding to the questions.)

Facilitator invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's Mass of the Lord's Supper?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you, and why did it speak to you?



Sharing Catholic Doctrine

Drawn from the Catechism of the Catholic Church

Catechist continues:

- ▶ Century after century Christians have gathered to commemorate Jesus' Last Supper with his friends. This premier, foundational event in Christian life is celebrated every Sunday in the eucharistic liturgy. It is the event the Christian community remembers and tells over and over again, the origin of the great gift of Eucharist.
- ▶ The Church, in and through its ritual prayer book, the Roman Missal, explains the focus of the Holy Thursday celebration. It is the liturgy in which the Eucharist and the priesthood were instituted. It is a liturgy in which the focus to love one another takes center stage.
- ▶ The first two readings focus our attention on the institution and origins of the Eucharist. The gospel has echoes of the priesthood. The entire liturgy, readings and ritual action, expresses the theme of love for one another.
- ▶ The Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday resembles every Sunday celebration of Eucharist. The liturgy does have a character and a focus unique to the Mass of the Lord's Supper. This liturgy does not attempt to reenact the Lord's Last Supper. We take an event that happened in the past, and we bring it alive in the present. We remember the event, and in the remembering it becomes alive and real for us today.
- ▶ The narrative is in the past tense. "The night he *was* betrayed, he *took* bread" etc. Thus, we do not engage in an historical re-enactment. When we tell the story of what Jesus did and what he in turn commanded us to do in his memory, we bring what he said and did into the present. It becomes alive for us today just as it was alive for those first disciples. We too experience what they experienced. We, in like manner, bring Jesus' paschal mystery, his passion, death, and resurrection into

the present. We participate in his ongoing work of redemption. We remember the redemption he accomplished on the cross, and we bring it into the here and now. We recommit to be participants in his cross, to join our lives anew to the cross of Christ.

- ▶ The Israelites often took pagan rituals or rituals from the culture, breathed new life and meaning into them, and made them their own. Christianity took Israelite rituals and did the same thing. Christians saw in them a foreshadowing of the long awaited Messiah.
- ▶ Thus, one must understand the Passover if one is to truly appreciate the significance of the Holy Thursday liturgy. Ancient springtime marked the passage of flocks to summer pastures. Nomads celebrated rites to protect them from evil as they embarked on their very dangerous journey. One ritual was the marking of tents with the blood of lambs.
- ▶ After the Exodus event in which the people were freed from slavery in Egypt, the Israelites easily transferred new meaning to this ancient rite of spring. The blood of the lamb was sprinkled on doorposts as a sign for the angel of death to pass over that house thus, sparing the first born of the Israelites. As stated earlier, Christianity gave new meaning to many of the Old Testament rituals, Passover in particular.

First reading. The first reading in the Holy Thursday liturgy reflects the ancient Israelite ritual of Passover. There were two parts to the ritual: unleavened bread and the sacrifice of the paschal lamb. Jesus celebrated the Passover ritual every year. The Last Supper was in the context of that meal. It was not a difficult leap for Christians to connect Jesus with the paschal lamb that was slaughtered in order to save Jewish firstborn children. Jesus shed his blood to save not just the firstborn but all people.

- ▶ Passover was celebrated with family—it was not a solitary event. It was celebrated in community. So too is the Eucharist celebrated in community. Israel understood itself in relationship to God as a people. Christians are similarly saved as a people. It is not a “Jesus and me” proposition. We are intimately connected with God’s people.

Second reading. St. Paul’s reading, believed to be the oldest account of the earliest celebrations of Eucharist, reflects that ancient ritual of breaking bread that has survived down to today. Paul’s letter to the Corinthians expresses eucharistic theology, the meaning associated with the Eucharist.

- ▶ The reading from Paul’s letter to the Corinthians is a very ancient text. It is not an account of early Christian Eucharist; it’s an account of what Jesus did—which was not a Eucharist but a Jewish meal in the context of Passover. Only the very earliest, most ancient celebrations of Eucharist (called *Breaking of the Bread*) placed an actual meal between bread and cup. The basic structure of Jewish Passover meals, which began with the blessing of bread and ended with the blessing of cup, included this order.
- ▶ The unleavened bread of Passover is a living memorial of the events of the people of Israel’s passage from slavery to freedom. The Israelites of the Exodus event used

unleavened bread since there was, in effect, no time for the bread to rise. They were people who were ready to go on the Lord's command. The unleavened bread of the Eucharist is a sign of Jesus' passage from death to life that gained for us passage from slavery to sin to freedom from the eternal effects of sin.

Catechist invites reflection on this question:

- ▶ Question for reflection: The blood of the paschal lamb protected the Israelites from death. They were freed from slavery and were given freedom and led to the promised land. Jesus passed from death to life thus freeing us from slavery to sin. Consider your own life. In what way, if any, can you relate to the freedom the Israelites were given after four hundred years in captivity and the freedom Christ won for us on the cross? Have you ever experienced deliverance from anything—perhaps a new found freedom (an image of the promised land); a movement from something awful (slavery) to something wonderful (freedom) in your life?

Gospel. One would think that the gospel for Holy Thursday would be the story of the institution of the Eucharist. We hear instead about what happened during the meal. The Church speaks volumes to us about the gospel chosen for this feast. We hear John the Evangelist telling the story of how Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. John closely connects Eucharist with washing feet. Some interpreters believe that John's gospel was a very early homily given at a eucharistic liturgy.

- ▶ Foot washing. Long ago, Holy Thursday was referred to as Maundy Thursday. Maundy comes from the word *mandatum*. It means "command." The word is from the Latin text of Jesus' words from John's Gospel later in the same chapter as the washing of feet: "I give you a new commandment: love one another as I have loved you." These words occur after the supper and begin Jesus' long farewell discourse. The word *mandatum* is connected to the foot washing because Jesus called his action at supper an example, a model, of what the new commandment he gives his disciples.
- ▶ The Holy Thursday ritual has been called the Mandatum, not because of the foot washing but because of the antiphon that is sung during the ritual. One of the antiphons is John's text: I give you a new commandment...
- ▶ Jesus continually poured out himself in complete love to God's people. The *mandatum* is a prelude to the ultimate gift of love he would extend to the whole world the next day as he sacrificed his life on the cross. We are not only to do as Jesus did, follow the example of washing the feet of others, we are to similarly be ready and willing to offer our lives for others as Christ offered his life for us.
- ▶ At one point in Church history, the *mandatum* was considered a sacrament. It was believed to be a sign of service, charity, and filial love and was celebrated frequently throughout the year. The ritual of foot washing dates to the 5th century in Jerusalem, 7th century in Gaul and Spain, and the 12th century in Rome.
- ▶ John is clear. If we want to share in the Eucharist we must wash the feet of others; we must offer humble service; we are to love with a paschal love, a love in which we die to self and offer our lives for others as we participate in Christ's ongoing

redemption of the world.

- Gifts for the poor. This is one liturgy in which the faithful are encouraged to process with their gifts for the poor. It is the only liturgy in which the Church selects the song that is to accompany the procession: “*Ubi caritas et amor.*” “Where true charity is dwelling, God is present there.” When the community offers their gifts for the poor, they commit through ritual and song to live by the directive set forth in the *mandatum*: go and love one another as Christ has loved us.
- Transfer of the Eucharist. There is no significant meaning attached to the transfer of the Eucharist other than a practical one. Enough eucharistic bread was consecrated for both the Holy Thursday and Good Friday liturgies. The Eucharist is simply taken to another place (a place of reserve) until it is brought back to be distributed for Holy Communion at the Good Friday liturgy, since Mass is not celebrated on Good Friday, and therefore, no hosts can be consecrated on that day through the celebration of the Eucharist.



Last Supper, 1685, Simon Ushakov, public domain

Reflection on the Gospel of John 13:1-15

Jesus removes his garment, takes a towel, and washes the feet of his disciples. Peter insists that his Lord should never wash his feet. Jesus tells Peter that if he does not allow him to wash Peter's feet, then Peter will have no share in his life. Peter then tells Jesus to wash every part of him. He tells them they must follow his example and wash the feet of others.

- ▶ Jesus lays aside his garment. Laying aside is an oblique reference to the laying aside of one's life. The text alerts us to what is about to take place on the next day, the fateful day of Jesus' execution. Jesus' action in the gospel prophetically prepares us for the handing over of Jesus' life.
- ▶ Jewish male slaves were not even allowed to wash the feet of others. Gentile slaves, women, and children were the only ones allowed to wash feet. It was less than menial. Jesus, the teacher, assumed the stance of a slave (not even a Jewish male slave) and laid down his life for his own disciples.
- ▶ A ritual bath was taken before a meal gathering such as this. The foot washing was the last washing to take place before the meal could be celebrated. The ritual of foot washing prepared the disciples for their meal with Jesus. Jesus' disciples' bodies were already clean from the ritual bath (one cannot miss the allusions to baptism). Verse three suggests that they were made clean simply by the words Jesus spoke to them.
- ▶ Beyond baptism Jesus was suggesting the cleansing of one's life that takes place by the struggle itself, the dust and dirt of life's every day journey.
- ▶ In order to prepare to eat with Jesus the implications were clear. Disciples were to serve one another.
- ▶ Since the disciples were already ritually washed (image of baptism), the way in which sins committed after baptism were cleansed was humble, faith, self-outpouring service to others.
- ▶ Jesus told his disciples to follow his lead, to do what he had done. The obvious meaning of his words: "Go and offer love and service to others with the mind and heart of a lowly servant."
- ▶ Also, if washing the feet of others grants the daily forgiveness of sins, then participation in and preparation for the Eucharist must include the forgiveness of one another's transgressions. There is a specific command to forgive one another's daily sins.
- ▶ On the eve of his passion and death Jesus offers us a new way to live and to love. The *mandatum* is a reminder that we are to daily offer our lives in service of others as we forgive all who have sinned against us. Such is the prayer we pray in preparation for Holy Communion each week: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Such is our preparation for dining at the Lord's table.
- ▶ The liturgy of Holy Thursday is the first act in a three-day event that unfolds salvation history and brings it alive for us today. We begin Holy Thursday by recalling the cross of glory in the opening antiphon of the Mass.
- ▶ The entire liturgy (and the entire three days, known as Triduum) stands in the

shadow of the cross, the cross that will come front and center on Good Friday. The cross that marks us as ones who take up our call and follow Christ is a reminder that we are called to carry that cross each day and join it to the burden Christ carried once and for all. Through Jesus we are saved and made free. Just as the Passover was a sign of liberation, so too is the Eucharist the sign of liberation for Christians.

Catechist invites discussion about these questions:

- ▶ If washing feet is an example of what Eucharist calls us to do, name some ways that you have washed feet in recent days and months. What are some ongoing ways you wash the feet of others? If you cannot think of any ways, what are some ways you might in the future wash the feet of others?
- ▶ In what way might you be called to lay down your life for another person?
- ▶ What one thing might God be asking of you as you reflect on the liturgy of Holy Thursday?



Closing Prayer

Grant, almighty God,
that, just as we are renewed
by the Supper of your Son in this present age,
so we may enjoy his banquet for all eternity.
Who lives and reigns for ever and ever

(Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper: "Prayer after Communion," *The Roman Missal*.)



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

Doctrinal Catechesis
Mary Birmingham

Triduum Part Two: Good Friday of the Lord's Passion



William-Adolphe Bouguereau (1825-1905) - Compassion (1897)



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
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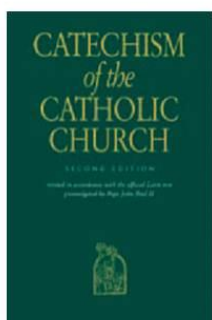
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Facilitator invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy for Good Friday of the Lord's Passion?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you, and why did it speak to you?



Sharing Catholic Doctrine

Drawn from the Catechism of the Catholic Church

Understanding the liturgy of Good Friday

Catechist continues:

- ▶ “On this day, when ‘Christ our Passover was sacrificed’ (1 Cor. 5:7), the Church meditates on the passion of her Lord and Spouse, adores the cross, commemorates her origin from the side of Christ asleep on the cross, and intercedes for the salvation of the whole world.”¹
- ▶ “Today sees our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross; we celebrate, so that we may understand that the cross is a celebration: a solemn, spiritual feast. Before, the cross was synonymous with condemnation; now it is an object of honor. Before, a symbol of death; now, the means of salvation. It has been the source of countless blessings for us: it has delivered us from error; it has shone on us when we were in darkness. We were vanquished, yet it reconciles us with God. We were foes, yet it has regained God’s friendship for us. We were estranged, yet it has brought us back to him. We have discovered a wellspring.”²
- ▶ St. John Chrysostom reminds us that Good Friday, underneath the solemnity and

¹ *Circular Letter Concerning the Preparation and Celebration of Easter Feasts*, Congregation for Divine Worship, (Rome, USCC 1988), #58, p. 16.

² John Chrysostom (ca. 350-407), “Homelie pour le Vendredi saint,” in *Homilaire patristique*, Lex Orandi 8 (Paris: Cerf, 1949) 65. In *Days of the Lord*, Vol. 3, (Collegeville: The Liturgical press, 1993), pp. 27-28.

sorrow over Christ's passion and death, is a celebration of hopeful joy. The Church waits in hopeful anticipation because we know the rest of the story. We do not go into Good Friday pretending that Christ did not rise from the dead. We do not pretend that the Easter Vigil is not taking place tomorrow night. We do not suffer from selective amnesia. But we do tell the story and invite the experience of Christ's passion and death to permeate the core of our being.

- ▶ Liturgy is authentic. It does not lie. We know Christ rose from the dead. We simply remember a past event and make it come alive for us today in the present. We remember Christ's passion, death, *and* resurrection. Today, however we do focus on the events surrounding his death and execution.
- ▶ Just as we do not minimize Jesus' suffering and death, we similarly do not gloss over it. This is a day for grieving. We fast in solidarity with those throughout the centuries who observed a pre-Easter fast from food and water.
- ▶ There are three parts to the Good Friday liturgy that has no official beginning and no official ending as it is part of a three-day celebration that began on Holy Thursday and ends with evening prayer on Easter Sunday. The three parts are liturgy of the word, veneration of the cross, and Holy Communion.
- ▶ The liturgical color is red, the color of martyrs who shed their blood.
- ▶ The priests enter the sanctuary and lie prostrate as an act of humility and also to show the grief and sorrow of the Church.

Liturgy of the Word

- ▶ *First reading.* The Fourth Servant Song sings of the suffering servant who gave his life for the many. Christians understand Jesus to be the long awaited suffering servant of Isaiah.
- ▶ *Responsorial Psalm.* Psalm 31 is a prayer of lament and a prayer of trust in God's power to save.
- ▶ *Second reading.* The Letter to the Hebrews. Jesus now reigns as the great high priest who sits on his heavenly throne. The reign of the Jewish high priesthood ended upon the high priest's death. Jesus on the other hand, is the eternal high priest whose reign never ends. His throne is a throne of grace. As a result of his great sacrifice he made it possible for the saints on earth to one day join him in the everlasting kingdom of God.
- ▶ **Veneration of the cross.** After the Passion narrative the faithful are invited to venerate (honor) the cross with a gesture, such as a kiss or a reverent bow. This instrument of torture has become for us the means of salvation. Again, we bring the past event of Jesus' passion and death and make it alive for us today. We are made privy to the experience of those first Christians. We are there, and it is now!
- ▶ **Holy Communion.** The faithful process forward to receive Holy Communion that was consecrated and reserved from the Holy Thursday liturgy.

Catechist invites reflection:

- There are many antagonists and protagonists in this story. At any given time we could find ourselves among the best and the worst of them. At first glance, with whom in this Passion narrative do you most relate and why? Jesus? Peter? The beloved disciple and Mary? Pilate? The crowd? Annas and Caiaphas? Nicodemus?

(Share briefly with one other person. We will return to this question after we read the interpretation and see if our answers have changed.)

Interpretation of the Passion according to John

- This exegesis of John's passion is based on Raymond E. Brown's *A Crucified Christ in Holy Week*. John's passion narrative is proclaimed every Good Friday. The context for this reading is given in the weeks preceding Holy Week in which other segments of John's Gospel are proclaimed. Brown asserts that the Jesus of the Good Friday Passion is a far different Jesus than the Jesus portrayed in the synoptic gospels. John's Jesus is the divine Christ who always understood his divinity and acted in such a way that his divinity, not his humanity, was in the forefront. In John's passion narrative Jesus is aware of his pre-existence. "Through death, therefore, he is returning to a state he has temporarily left during his stay in this world. (17:5)"³ After Jesus' death, he returns to his eternal home.
- Jesus is in control of his own destiny. He is completely and totally aware of his surroundings. The Jesus of John's Gospel is the omniscient, all-knowing Christ. He freely offers his life. Jesus is not afraid. He knows he will be victorious over Satan.
- John's portrayal of Jesus is the portrait most commonly taught to the faithful. John's intent throughout his gospel is to proclaim the word made flesh. Jesus is the *Logos*, God's Word, the divine Lord who is master of the saving events that surround him.
- John uses the light and darkness motif throughout his gospel. Jesus is the light of the world who came to dispel the darkness. Judas betrays Christ in the darkness. He needed a lantern in order to see. Without light he was in total darkness. Judas was in the dark. This imagery begs the question of all believers: Are we in the dark as well? Do we also need a lantern to see? Where is the darkness in our lives?
- John's Jesus is the king who succumbs to no one. He does not pray that God deliver him from the horror to come (as he does in the reference to Mark's gospel in the second reading from Hebrews). He proceeds with power, conviction, and a sense of purpose. No earthly power or principality has control over him or his destiny.
- Jesus comes before Annas, Caiaphas' father-in-law, and is interrogated by the police. They see if there is enough to hold him on charges of insurrection. If so, he could then be tried in a Roman court. Jesus is so clever with Annas that his captors abuse him.
- John's Gospel is a gospel of contrasts. Jesus' strength and sense of purpose and destiny stand in stark contrast to Peter's weakness. Peter stands in contrast to the

³ Raymond E. Brown, *A Crucified Christ in Holy Week*, (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1986), 57

beloved disciple of John's Gospel—the “beloved disciple” who was at the Last Supper, the trial, the foot of the cross, the empty tomb, and the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus.

- ▶ The “beloved disciple” according to John is witness to events, the one who is most enlightened, and the one who loves Jesus the most. Peter is not held up as the perfect disciple. The beloved disciple, on the other hand, does have that distinction.
- ▶ One gets swept away in the drama of unfolding events. Jesus stands before Pilate. The Jewish community was outside waiting to see what Pilate would do. Jesus and Pilate are face to face. Scripture scholar Raymond Brown insists that it is Pilate who is put on trial. Pilate knows the truth. The question is: “Will he witness to the truth, or will he allow himself to be swept away by the mob?” Tension mounts. Jesus is in control of his own future, of that we can be sure. Will Pilate give in to the people he is supposed to govern, or will he lead as he should? We know his choice. He chooses to save face rather than to bear witness to the truth.⁴
- ▶ Jesus was in control. Pilate was certainly outshined by his intellectual superior. Jesus was a master at the art of repartee and cleverly used it in his exchange with Pilate who thought he was in control. It was really Jesus who was in control here. Jesus hardly stands mute as he did in Mark's Gospel. Jesus defends himself.
- ▶ Jesus did not refuse the title Pilate hurled at him: “King of the Jews.” If Pilate wanted to refer to him in that manner, so be it. However, his mission was not to be an earthly king or ruler. His mission was to testify to the truth, to witness to it. (Jn. 18:37).
- ▶ The Jews, particularly the Zealots, misinterpreted the prophecies regarding the coming of the messiah. Messianic fever was at an all-time high at the time of Jesus. The people were living under Roman occupation and oppression. Conditions were ripe for a messiah to come and save the people, a military, grand warrior, like David, who would lead the people to glory and re-establish the former glory of Israel. The messiah they were looking for and the messiah they received were two different things. The messiah they received was the suffering servant of the Book of Isaiah who suffered for the sins of the many. The messiah they wanted was a military-type folk hero.
- ▶ Jesus was sentenced to a tortuous scourging. His cloak was ripped from him, and he was processed to his death on Calvary. Every narrative of the Passion from all four evangelists points the accusing finger at the crowd by placing the words, “Crucify him!” on their lips. John's version however shows more intensity than all the others. Jesus was crowned with the cloak of a king, and a crown of thorns was placed on his head. He now stands utterly alone, complete and total abandonment.
- ▶ His own people abandon him. The Jewish people choose Caesar over their own son, thus forfeiting access to the messianic reign coming alive before their very eyes. It is a tragedy of epic proportions. Pilate extracts the Jewish people's fidelity to Caesar in the final scene thereby ensuring their abdication of any hopes for

⁴ Cf. *ibid*, p. 61.

participation in the messianic kingdom of God.⁵ And so Pilate hands Jesus over to the priests to be crucified.

- ▶ The final act of this unfolding drama comes crashing down. Jesus willingly offers his life. He carries his own cross. Pilate puts the charge (*titulus*) over his head: “King of the Jews.” John, the evangelist, theologian, and master of irony, has none other than Pilate, the official head of government, declare the sovereignty of Jesus as king while at the same time his own people rejected his kingship. Again, a tragedy of epic proportions! This Lord and King reigned from his wooden throne, the wood of the cross.
- ▶ John has Jesus wearing a seamless garment. Some scholars suggest that it is an allusion to the white garment worn by the high priest, reminding us today of the second reading for today’s liturgy, the letter to the Hebrews in which Jesus reigns not only as king but as the new high priest. Other opinions suggest that the garment was a symbol of unity (Brown, p. 64).
- ▶ Mark and Matthew have Jesus completely and totally alone and abandoned at the cross. John symbolically places Mary and the beloved disciple at the foot of the cross as a reminder that a new family was just created. Mary is named mother of the beloved disciple and the beloved disciple is named son, thus becoming Jesus’ brother. Jesus created a family of disciples right from the cross, the birthplace of the Church.⁶
- ▶ John’s use of symbolism extends to the wine-soaked hyssop that Jesus was given. The leaf used to sprinkle blood on the doorposts of the Israelites, thus saving the first-born children from the angel of death in the Exodus story, was called hyssop. John intimately connects Jesus with the paschal lamb. Jesus was sentenced at high noon, the exact time when the high priests slaughtered all the lambs for Passover. Jesus fulfilled John the Baptist’s prophetic utterance: “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.” His bones were not broken, thus connecting him symbolically to the unblemished paschal lamb, whose bones were also not broken.
- ▶ Jesus even controlled the timing of his own death. He said, “It is finished,” and then he handed over his spirit. Raymond Brown tells us that John, more than the other gospels, captures and maintains a very ancient Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, that is, the Spirit of Jesus, was “an intimate part of the death and resurrection.”⁷ John’s Gospel is adamant that the Spirit was not given to Jesus’ followers until that moment. He further tells us that this is illustrated even further when Jesus breathed his Spirit upon them when he

⁵ Brown alerts us to the anti-Jewish sentiment in John’s Gospel. He tells us that we are not to ignore it or sugar coat it. It was real. There was tension between Christians and Jews. It was not just leveled at the leadership, but it was against the synagogue. John’s community suffered great persecution at the hands of their Jewish brothers and sisters. They were thrown out of the synagogue, which made them very vulnerable. The Romans allowed the Jews to live as they wished, but were suspicious of Christians. The hostility was deep, and it was bitter. However, we are not to use it as a cause and source of anti-Jewish sentiment, but rather understand it in light of the cultural and religious problems of the first century. (*Word and Worship Workbook, Year C*, 222.)

⁶ Raymond E. Brown, *A Crucified Christ in Holy Week*, p. 64.

⁷ Ibid. p. 66.

appeared to them on Easter Sunday night (Jn. 20:22).

- ▶ The other evangelists portray turbulent, miraculous signs surrounding the scene: the Temple curtain is torn, saints come forth from tombs, and a Roman centurion expresses awe-filled faith. John, on the other hand, localizes all the signs in Jesus' body. Jesus' side is pierced, and blood and water flow from it. Earlier in John we heard that within Jesus living water would flow; that water would be the Spirit, given when Jesus entered his glory.
- ▶ Another symbolic meaning to the flow of water and blood is initiatory—the water of baptism and the blood of the Eucharist, by which new members are incorporated into Christ's body. From Calvary the Spirit is poured forth on the Church; it is on Calvary the Church is born. "The Church was born at the foot of the cross through the water of baptism and the blood of Eucharist that flowed from his side."⁸
- ▶ Jesus was removed from the cross in a dignified manner, that befitting a king (see picture above), resplendent with myrrh, oil, and cloth wrappings. Nicodemus, who had before been reluctant to step forward and openly acknowledge discipleship, now does so. "At his death, Jesus continued to reconcile sinners to himself. Jesus died as he lived in John's Gospel: as a conquering, royal king, in charge of his own destiny, who overcame the sins of the world. Jesus fought the great battle with Satan and was victorious."⁹
- ▶ The cross was transformed from a symbol of torture, death, and execution of an innocent victim, to a symbol of victory, vindication, and life. Faithful disciples grieve and mourn, true, but, paradoxically, they are filled with joy. They offer praise and thanks to God for so great a sacrifice and gift, for the incredible mercy of God who loved us so greatly that he sent his son to die for a sinful world.

Catechist continues with these questions for reflection:

- ▶ After reflecting on the meaning of the Passion narrative, how would you now answer the earlier question that was posed? Keeping in mind that at any given time we could find ourselves among the best and the worst of them, at first glance, with whom in this Passion narrative do you most relate and why? Jesus? Peter? The beloved disciple and Mary? Pilate? The crowd? Annas and Caiaphas? Nicodemus?
- ▶ Is your answer any different now than it was before we began? If so, what changed? If not, why are you affirmed in your original answer?
- ▶ In what way might you be called to lay down your life for another person as Jesus did in this Passion story?
- ▶ What one thing might God be asking of you as you reflect on the liturgy of Good Friday?

⁸ Mary Birmingham, *Word and Worship Workbook, Year C*, (Paulist Press, 1998), p. 223.

⁹ Ibid.

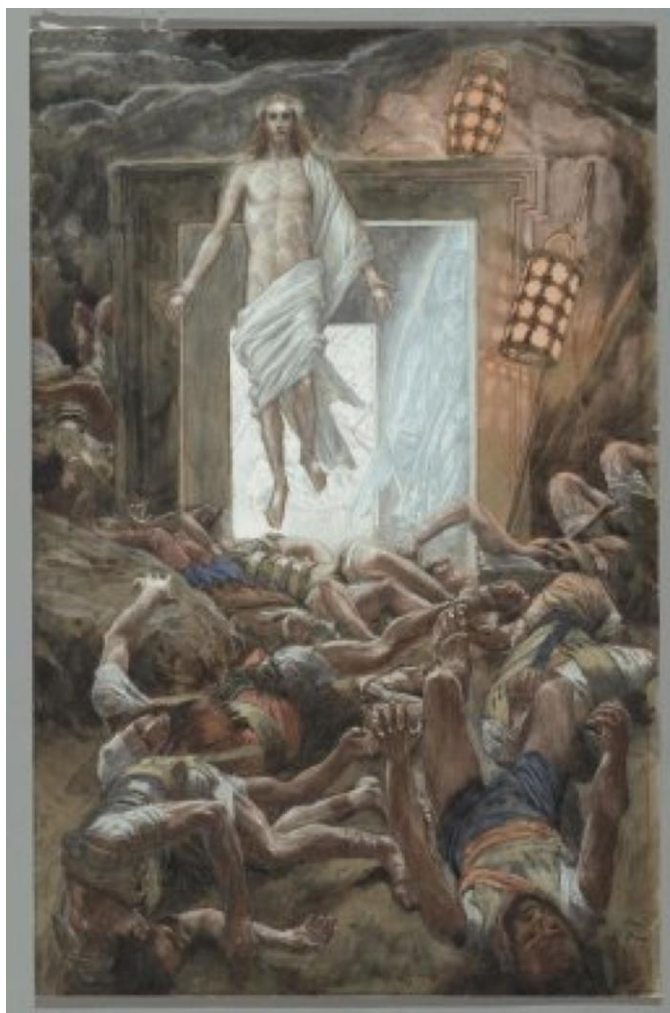


Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

Doctrinal Catechesis Session
Mary Birmingham

Triduum Part Three: The Easter Vigil Liturgy



James Tissot, 1886-1894, *The Resurrection*.



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us,
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil. Amen.

✓ Note to the Catechist

There may be more material than you can use in a one-hour session. Select and arrange accordingly. Use questions and material that are best suited for your particular group.



Read the connecting statement

to draw the line between this week's liturgy and this chosen doctrinal theme.

This connecting statement is found in the *Breaking Open the Word* worksheet for this week.

Catholic Faith, Life & Creed Version 2.0

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Version 2.0 reflects all recent revisions in the Roman Missal.

NIHIL OBSTAT
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Censor Liborum

IMPRIMATUR
† Most Rev. John Noonan
Bishop of Orlando

June 27, 2011

Editors: Bill Huebsch, Diana Macalintal, & Nick Wagner

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Facilitator invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, then surface insights in the wider group. This session is mystagogical. It looks back at the liturgy not forward to it. Perhaps participants could meet Easter week and reflect on the experience of the Vigil.

- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you, and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most at the Easter Vigil liturgy?
- ▶ What spoke to your heart?
- ▶ What invited conversion of your heart?

Understanding the Easter Vigil

Catechist continues:

- ▶ The Easter Vigil is the third in a three-part liturgy that extends over three days and celebrates and makes present the paschal mystery of Christ: his passion, death, and resurrection.
- ▶ The way we approach the Easter Vigil is as one who thirsts for life-changing meaning.

Symbols and rituals of meaning and belonging

Catechist continues:

- ▶ We find meaning in the symbols that are renewed each and every Easter Vigil. When we use the symbols in the ritual actions of the Vigil, we are given our identity.
- ▶ Why do we engage in such ritual? Because ritual gives our lives purpose and meaning. Ritual draws from the actions of everyday life and breathes meaning into those actions.
- ▶ We discover who and what we are when we use the dominant symbols of the Triduum. For example, when we venerate and carry the cross of Christ, we are reminded that we are people of the cross who are willing to die and rise with Christ. We get our Catholic identity from those symbols.
- ▶ The symbols manifest Christ's paschal mystery. They are sacramental symbols, and the Church teaches that Christ is present in those symbols.
- ▶ Christians gather for the Triduum in order to renew their mission and commission for yet another year. The faithful are empowered to go out into the world and become what they have received. They are to become the light of Christ in the world; they are to carry their cross of struggle and victory; they are called to be hearers and doers of the word, to be immersed in life-giving water that refreshes and brings new life; to be the strength of the Spirit conferred in oil and laying on of hands; they are to literally put on Christ, to go out and lay hands upon those who are broken, sick, and suffering, and to ultimately, as St. Augustine said, become the body/bread they have shared and the wine/blood poured out for the world.
- ▶ The symbols of the Easter Vigil embody the reality they express.
- ▶ The use of full, robust symbols expresses the reality. Baptism is valid whether a thimble-full of water or an ocean is used, but full immersion more clearly expresses and embodies the sacramental reality. What better way to express a

watery, embryonic tomb and participation in Christ's death and resurrection than to be baptized in enough water in which to drown?

- ▶ We give God thanks and praise for this annual commemoration of his passage from death to life as we feast on Christ's body and drink the blood of salvation.
- ▶ When we use the sacramental symbols of the Easter Vigil, we engage in the worthy work of making Church.

Here are some of the symbols which express our identity:

1. Light/Fire
2. Community
3. Cross
4. Word
5. Water
6. Oil
7. Laying on of Hands
8. Bread and Wine

Who are we if the dominant symbols express our identity?

Community:

We are God's people. We are people who acknowledge the sacramental presence of Christ in the gathered assembly. As the people of God we join our broken lives to the paschal mystery of Christ and become his body in the world.

Cross:

We are people of the cross who embrace the cross of struggle and the cross of victory in our own lives and join that cross to the cross of Christ. We participate in the ongoing work of redemption. What greater meaning can we derive from the crosses in our lives?

Light and Fire:

We are people of the light. We light the path for others as Christ lights the way for us. We light the new fire and are led by its brilliance. We recommit to go out and blaze the trail of conversion in our world, to light holy fires of conversion.

Word:

We are people of the Word. We are called to be hearers and doers of the word. We recall our salvation history in the stories of the Triduum, especially the Easter Vigil. We are there, and it is now. Those stories become our stories; we take them and make them our own. We go out and live those stories strengthened by their wisdom and power. We are invited to participate in God's ongoing work of re-creation as did Abraham, Moses, Noah, Isaiah, and Paul before us. Nourished by God's word, we become what we receive. We become God's living word in the world for yet another year.

Water:

We too are immersed with the Elect as they enter the waters of death and resurrection. We are reminded that we too have died with Christ and are born to new life. We too are willing to go out and die for others, to be completely immersed in the life of the Spirit, to go out into the world to be life-giving, refreshing, cleansing waters. Water immerses us once again in our commitment to live as priest to serve God's people, prophet to proclaim God's word, and king to lead people to Christ.

Oil:

We recall a time when we too, like the neophytes, were anointed with the oil of the Spirit, when we were anointed with the indelible character that cannot be washed off, the seal and strength of the sacrament. We continue to live in the power and strength of the sacrament and share that strength with those around us. The power of this sacramental oil anoints us for our baptismal mission in the world. One woman beautifully expressed her experience of plentiful oil: "When oil was lavishly poured on my head, I realized that I am forever sealed to Christ. Like oil, Christ is not easily dismissed or rubbed off. He is permanently soaked into my being."

Laying on of Hands:

As hands are laid on the neophytes and over the assembly in the various epicletic (invoking the Spirit) actions of the liturgy, we are reminded that we too are to become the healing, strengthening, transforming hands of Christ in the world.

Bread and Wine:

As we feast, some for the first time and others once again, we are reminded that every eucharistic feast is the repeatable sacrament of initiation—we recommit to die and rise with Christ—to allow our bodies to be broken for others and our blood to be poured out. We are to become what we have received. We are the body of Christ. We are filled with the presence of Christ in the Eucharist which renews us and deepens our bond to him and to one another.

Catechist invites participants to discuss in the larger group.

- Now that you have considered the symbols, do you have any renewed insight or something you experienced that resonates with what the Church teaches about the sacramental symbols?

The Easter Vigil

There are four parts to the Easter Vigil:

1. The Solemn Beginning of the Vigil or Lucernarium
2. The Liturgy of the Word
3. Baptismal Liturgy
4. The Liturgy of the Eucharist

The Solemn Beginning of the Vigil: Symbol of Light

- ▶ Like our ancestors in faith who followed the pillar of fire to freedom, we too burn the holy fire and are led by its brilliance (the new fire and Easter Candle) to the promised land (Christ's kingdom on earth). Christ himself dispels the darkness of sin and illuminates our path.

Liturgy of the Word: Symbol of the Word of God

- ▶ Tonight is different from all other nights because this night is the "mother of all vigils" in which we proclaim nine readings that are foundation to the story of our salvation as we keep watch for the resurrection. We proclaim the story of creation, the Exodus (liberation of the Jews out of bondage), the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac.
- ▶ We hear from the great prophets of old, prophets who foretold the coming of Christ: Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Baruch.
- ▶ We hear St. Paul teach us that baptism immerses us in Christ's death.
- ▶ We ultimately tell the story of Jesus' resurrection from the dead.
- ▶ We share those stories of salvation history, and that history becomes our history.
- ▶ We are thus renewed to live as redeemed people.

Catechist invites participants to break into dyads and respond to the following question.

- ▶ What reading from the Easter Vigil touched you the most and why?
- ▶ What did it mean to you?
- ▶ In what way did it speak to your heart?
- ▶ What were the primary themes of those readings?
- ▶ What stories of salvation did we tell, and why were those stories important?

Baptismal Liturgy: Symbols of water, oil, & laying on of hands

- ▶ The neophytes are baptized into the life of Christ, into his death and resurrection, and into the life of the community. They are healed and forgiven of the effects of original sin. They put on Christ and become a new creation in Christ. The entire Christian community renews their commitment to live as priest, prophet, and king. The newly baptized are anointed with the oil of salvation and are confirmed with the Holy Spirit. Hands are laid upon them, and they have been transformed into the likeness of Christ. They are signed and sealed in the life of Christ. They are touched with the power of God's hand; they are given the gift of the Holy Spirit, forever sealed into Christ's service.

Liturgy of the Eucharist: Symbols of Bread and Wine

- ▶ Neophytes complete their initiation when they, for the first time, process to the Eucharistic table and share in Communion. They feast on Christ's body and blood, which fully initiates them into the eucharistic community. Even though baptism is a primary focus at the Easter Vigil, some people think that baptism is what makes a person a Catholic. Baptism makes a person a Christian. The sacrament of Eucharist is what completes the person's membership in the Catholic communion.

Every time we celebrate the Eucharist, St. Augustine reminds us, we are initiated into Jesus' life all over again in the repeatable sacrament of initiation.

- ▶ The faithful and the neophytes process together and share in the fruits of the sacrament. They receive an increase in their union with Jesus—they become more intimately one with him. Venial sins are forgiven; they are strengthened to avoid serious sin (mortal sins). The bond of friendship and love between Jesus and each person is strengthened as well as the bonds of unity in the Church.

Catechist leads the people in a final reflection. Participants break into dyads.

- ▶ What are the implications of the Easter Vigil for your life?
- ▶ In what way does this liturgy invite transformation in your life?
- ▶ What does it mean that you are to become what you have received? What does that have to do with your everyday life?
- ▶ What does it mean that you have been baptized into Christ's death and resurrection? How does that impact your Christian life?
- ▶ In what way does this liturgy invite you to more fully participate in the paschal mystery of Christ?



Closing Prayer

Anima Christi

Soul of Christ, sanctify me.
Body of Christ, save me.
Blood of Christ, inebriate me.
Water from Christ's side, wash me.
Passion of Christ, strengthen me.
O good Jesus, hear me.
Within Thy wounds hide me.
Suffer me not to be separated from Thee.
From the malicious enemy defend me.
In the hour of my death call me
And bid me come unto Thee,
That I may praise Thee with Thy saints
and with Thy angels,
Forever and ever
Amen.